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SUBJECT: ITALIAN REACTIONS TO PRESIDENT'S REMARKS ON GLOBAL
MILITARY TRANSFORMATION

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11. (U) Summary. President Bush's speech on military transformation received limited initial government reaction and media coverage in Italy. Most headlines focused on US troop reductions in Europe, with several articles commenting that the planned changes signify NATO's decreased importance in the eyes of the US and payback to Germany for its lack of support in Iraq. Curiously, many articles also highlighted the planned transfer of the US Navy's European headquarters from London to Naples -- despite the fact that the move was not mentioned in the President's speech. End summary.

12. (U) In an interview with top-circulation Corriere della Sera, FM Frattini emphasized that President Bush's announcement to restructure the presence of US troops abroad (Ref A) did not signal a reduction in the US commitment to Europe or Asia. Commenting that the Cold War is behind us, Frattini said the decision to move NAVEUR headquarters from London to Naples is significant recognition of the importance of the Mediterranean.

13. (U) Stefano Silvestri, head of one of Rome's leading think tanks, comments in leading business daily Il Sole-24 Ore that the President's decision signals a transformation in the relationship between NATO and its allies. He notes that rather than a strategic partnership, NATO has become an unstable alliance where US forces serve US interests, but allies, who support and sustain those forces, don't also share those interests. Lucia Annunziata, former Director of the government-controlled RAI Uno television network known for her outspoken and often controversial views, comes to a similar conclusion in an editorial previewing the President's speech in the August 15 edition of La Stampa. Even pro-Berlusconi Il Foglio argues that the move, a response to NATO's reluctance to commit itself in Iraq, reflects the difference in approach to the war on terrorism that will lead NATO allies down separate paths.

14. (SBU) Comment. Although the NAVEUR move was not mentioned in the President's speech, many newspaper reports highlighted this as one of the major consequences for Italy of the US' Global Defense Posture Review. FM Frattini's comments, coming at the end of a lengthy interview about UNSC reform in which he claimed that President Bush specifically promised PM Berlusconi that the US would do nothing to harm Italy's interests, has even led to speculation that the NAVEUR decision is part of a trade-off agreed between the two leaders that would leave Italy without a UN Security Council seat. We can expect the Italian press to come up with even more inventive explanations of why global reposturing is not simply a strategic decision, but one based also on political considerations. End comment.

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